



## Word families

- 1 This exercise explores the idea of word families and how they are shown in the dictionary. It looks at how the same idea can be expressed in different ways, using different parts of speech from the same word family, an important skill in academic writing.

Write the word **stable** on the board and elicit its meaning as an adjective, plus an example sentence using it. Elicit words from the same word family as *stable*. (Alternatively, you could choose a different word family from the one on the worksheet – e.g. **conclude**, **identity** or **significant**.) Students look up **stable** in the dictionary to check all the members of the word family. Elicit answers to questions a. (**unstable**) and b. something like 'to make something likely to change or fail'. Compare students' ideas with the actual definition of **destabilize** in the dictionary: 'to make a system, country, government, etc. become less firmly established or successful'. Point out that the definition tells you what kind of thing can be 'destabilized'. This shows how students can use their existing knowledge to get close to the meaning of a word, and how the dictionary can help them build on that knowledge and pinpoint the meaning more exactly.

- 2 Students complete the gapfill exercise, checking the word families in the dictionary to find the missing word in each case:
  - a **differ** – point out that both the adjective **different** and verb **differ** are followed by **from**
  - b **structurally**
  - c **insufficient**
  - d **interactions**
  - e **evident** – point out that as the noun **evidence** has changed to an adjective, so the adjective **clear** needs to change to the adverb **clearly**.
- 3 Mention that to complete the paraphrases, students may need to change the form of some of the words (e.g. add a third person or plural s). Discuss any alternative answers and decide which are most concise/clear.
  - a Kane greatly emphasizes this second point.
  - b Internet users were invited to be participants in an online study.
  - c The authors' conclusion was that most sedimentation occurred below the beach zone.
  - d The study is reliant on data from a national survey. – Again, both the verb **rely** and adjective **reliant** need to be followed by the same preposition – **on**.
  - e More work is clearly needed on this topic. or *Clearly*, more work is needed on this topic. – the adverb **clearly** can be applied to the verb **needed** or the whole sentence.

- 4 This exercise is designed to help students understand *why* it might be useful to express the same idea using different parts of speech. The first text, using an adverb-verb clause (*Social class has traditionally been divided ...*) is explanatory in nature: it is giving information that it assumes the reader does not already know. The second text makes a claim about the topic of the first text: it uses an adjective-noun phrase to refer to that topic (*traditional British social divisions of upper, middle and working class*) but then moves on to its claim, without explaining those traditional divisions any further: it assumes that the reader already knows what these are. Academic writing often uses noun phrases to refer to ideas that either have already been explained earlier in the text, or that it assumes the reader already knows about. The more expert the expected reader of a text, the more this shared knowledge may be assumed, so that a research article in a journal, for example, written by an expert for other experts to read, may be very densely written, making heavy use of complex noun phrases. This contrasts with spoken and informal language which typically uses more verbs to explain and communicate. EAP students may not be writing research articles yet, but learning to use more noun phrases in their writing will help it to sound more academic in tone and to express ideas more concisely.
- 5 This activity gives students the opportunity to practise using word families to paraphrase ideas from their own subject area. Students can either choose their own texts or you can select (sections of) texts previously studied in class. Students can work individually or in groups, presenting and explaining their choices in feedback. This is an opportunity for students to experiment with different possibilities and to discuss which paraphrases are most natural, elegant, concise, etc. and which are rather awkward or clumsy.

## Word families

Many words have several different derivatives. Different word endings can indicate different parts of speech. A **prefix** at the beginning of the word can indicate a word with the opposite meaning. Look at this extract from the entry for **stable**:

**stable** **AWL** /'sterbl/ *adj.* **1** not likely to change or fail; firmly established:  
*The population has remained relatively stable.* ◇ *India has enjoyed stable democracy for over half a century.* ◇ *The economy had high but stable inflation.*

→ compare CONSTANT<sup>1</sup> (2), STEADY (2)

**OPP** UNSTABLE (1) **2** (of a substance)

staying in the same chemical or ATOMIC

state: *A sugar such as glucose is stable at body temperature.*

### WORD FAMILY

stable *adj.*

stability *noun*

stabilize *verb*

unstable *adj.*

instability *noun*

destabilize *verb*

The **Word Family** box shows all the words that are related to **stable** and have a similar or opposite meaning.

- 1 a Which word means 'likely to change or fail suddenly'?  
 b Can you explain what **destabilize** means?
- 2 Sometimes you can express the same idea in different ways, using a different part of speech from the same word family. This can be useful when you are summarizing or paraphrasing. Use your dictionary to look up the word in **bold** in the first sentence in each pair below. Choose a different word from the Word Family box to complete the second sentence, expressing the same idea in a slightly different way.

*Example:* Reported intentions are **different** from actual behaviour.

Reported intentions differ from actual behaviour.

- a The human eye is a complex **structure**.  
 The human eye is \_\_\_\_\_ complex.
- b The city lacks **sufficient** water resources.  
 The city's water resources are \_\_\_\_\_.
- c These events involve numerous components that **interact** in complicated ways.  
 These events involve numerous components with complicated \_\_\_\_\_.
- d There is clear **evidence** of culture in chimpanzees.  
 Culture is clearly \_\_\_\_\_ in chimpanzees.

- 3 For each of the following sentences, write a new sentence that expresses the same idea using the word in **bold** below.

*Example:* Kane gives great emphasis to this second point.

**emphasize**

*Kane greatly emphasizes this second point.*

- a Internet users were invited to participate in an online study.

**participant**

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- b The authors concluded that most sedimentation occurred below the beach zone.

**conclusion**

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- c The study relies on data from a national survey.

**reliant**

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- d It is clear that more work is needed on this topic.

**clearly**

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- 4 Read texts A and B. Identify the two words in the first line of each text that belong to the same two word families.

- A Social class has traditionally been divided into three broad categories: an *upper class* that owns property, land, and investments and is wealthy and powerful; a *middle class* made up of professional workers such as managers and owners of small businesses; a *lower class* of people who have low-paid jobs or who are unemployed.

SOURCE: de Chazal, E. and Rogers, L. (2013). *Oxford EAP Intermediate/B1+*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- B Traditional British social divisions of upper, middle and working class seem out of date in the 21st century, no longer reflecting modern occupations or lifestyles.

BBC News Magazine, 3 April 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22000973>

In Text A the writer uses an **adverb + verb** to express an idea which writer B expresses using a **noun phrase** (adjective + noun). How does this change the focus of the sentence? What is the main idea in text A and in text B?

## Practice

- 5 Find a short text in your own discipline and identify two or three words that belong to word families. What are the other members of the word family? Write a short paraphrase of one of the ideas in the text, using different word family members.